

8 - Choose Love Gratitude

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Purpose: The purpose of the transcripts is to provide readers and listeners with a written version of each episode of the UAGC Center for Early Childhood Education's Early Childhood Chatter Podcast so they can follow along with the audio content. www.uagc.edu/ece-center/chatter-podcast

Audience: Current Active & Enrolled Students

Episode Transcript

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Hello, everyone, and welcome to Early Childhood Chatter with Dr. Shipley and Dr. Hilde. We will upload a new episode every other week on Wednesdays. This month, we are providing an episode every week, so make sure to subscribe to this podcast.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: Twice a month, we will come to you with a 10-minute professional development inspiration that you can quickly listen to for new ideas to use today. Don't forget to subscribe to this podcast to get notifications about future episodes.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: You will want to listen to the next four episodes in order as they build on each other.

Last week, we talked about courage. We are honored to have Scarlett Lewis with us this entire month. If you haven't listened to the last episode, go ahead and start there.

These four episodes may be over 10 minutes, but it's well worth everything she has to say. So, Scarlett is our special guest, and we are going to share her story of surviving and thriving one of the country's worst tragedies, which was Sandy Hook. While weaving in lessons, she learned along the way and strategies that you can use in your own life to thrive, even in uncertain times.

She will share a powerful formula that can lead you to choosing love in any situation, circumstance, or interaction. December is the month that this tragedy occurred, and we are blessed to have her here with us.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: Scarlett Lewis is an author, speaker, and founder of the Jesse Lewis Choose Love Movement that offers no-cost social and emotional programming in schools, homes, and communities all over the world.

Their mission is to offer a solution to the issues that our kids in today's world face and provide a path towards flourishing. Scarlett is the mother of Jesse Lewis, who was killed in Sandy Hook Elementary School and left a message on their kitchen chalkboard that inspired the movement, Nurturing Healing Love. Jesse is on the presidential shortlist for the Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian honor for saving nine of his classmates' lives before losing his own.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Today, Scarlett is going to talk about gratitude, and we're so excited to hear her perspective. So, Scarlett, why did you choose gratitude as one of the important things that has happened after this tragedy?

Scarlett Lewis Speaker: Well, let me start by saying I'm so grateful to be here with both of you, Stephanie and Tisha. Thank you so much for having me on the podcast and helping me spread awareness of the Choose Love Movement.

It's an honor to be here. You know, everyone started asking me right after the tragedy, what can we do? What can we do? And this was a common theme, so I decided at Jesse's funeral to get up and to address everybody who had asked me what they can do, how they can help. I said this tragedy started in the shooter's head as a thought.

This is where everything starts within us. Our thoughts impact our feelings, which then impact our behavior. And I pictured him as a little boy having difficult thoughts without the skills or nurturing environment to handle those thoughts.

And we know so much about our thoughts today. We know that as adults, we have between 50 and 70,000 thoughts a day. We know also through the latest neuroscience that between 70 to 80 percent of our total thoughts are negative.

That means angry, nonproductive, and don't serve us every day. And then over 95 percent of our thoughts are repetitive, so that means the same thoughts we had yesterday, a week ago, a month ago, a year ago, up to five years before. So, the majority of our thoughts are negative and repetitive.

These thoughts make up our beliefs, which make up our perception of our reality. The majority of them are negative and repetitive. Now this is because we have a negative bias that we're all born with, it's woven into our DNA. We literally are scanning for danger, just like the cavemen were scanning for saber-toothed tigers and those were the ones that were going to live to pass down their genes. Well, we're doing the same thing.

We are scanning for danger, and the majority of us don't even realize it. And so, I asked everyone on that day at Jesse's funeral, I said, there is something that you can do. You can start thinking about what you think about, and you can change one angry thought a day into a loving thought.

And by doing that, you'll make yourself feel better. It's pretty simple. Loving, kind, compassionate thoughts feel good, and that's reflected in how we treat one another.

Angry, hateful, resentful thoughts feel bad, and that's also reflected in our behavior. And you will positively impact those around you, and through the ripple effect, you will make this a safer, more peaceful, and loving world. So, about a week later, I started getting calls, emails, texts back from all across the country from these people that said, oh my gosh, this one simple act completely changed my life.

And so really what I'm talking about here is using gratitude to shift our mind. This is how we literally now teach this in our program because it's so powerful. We know that we're kind of wired to have these negative and repetitive thoughts, and I'm sure even if you're the happiest person, you sometimes feel your thoughts wander into a dark place, or everybody has stuff happen to them that is not positive.

And it's okay to have those negative thoughts. Anything that you feel is valid and okay. Even anger is telling you some really important information, like something is not right, or you need to get out of a situation.

But when you're ready to switch out of those lower energy thoughts, you can use gratitude to shift the thoughts. And it's so incredible how this works because out of all those tens of thousands of thoughts, you can only focus on one thought at a time. So that means you can only focus on an angry, lower energy, maybe resentful thought or a grateful one.

And in our lives, there's always something to be grateful for, regardless of what's going on in your life. There is always something to be grateful for. And with my healing, I found myself doing this, practicing this gratitude all day long.

And I still do. I literally take off gratitudes in my mind all day long to keep me in a state of forward movement, really, literally an attitude of gratitude. We know you're either in one or the other state.

You're either in an attitude of gratitude where you're focusing on abundance and what you have, or you're focusing on what you don't have and you're in a state of lack. And so, you know, I just wanted, I wanted to model for my son, as I said in the first episode, how to get through the difficult times that we were facing with grace and in a positive way and literally to grow from them. And gratitude was a big part of how we did that.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: Scarlett, wow, you gave me so much to think about. So, one of the things you said as our thoughts impact our feelings and that impacts our behavior, and it just really resonated with me because indeed it kind

of starts with our thoughts. So, I'm just wondering if you have anything that you might think of that we could maybe teach our youngest learners and actually even adults that they're able to recognize that spot that they're in.

So that metacognition that they might be heading to, or they might be in that negative or dark place so that they can indeed become more mindful, you know, and go towards the attitude of gratitude.

Scarlett Lewis Speaker: Absolutely. I mean, I think first of all, it's important to say that whatever you're feeling is valid and there are a whole range of feelings and we all go through this range of feeling, but unless we understand, unless we take a moment to be present and to think about what we're thinking about and what we're feeling, we can't manage our emotions.

And so, it's really important to take that time to think about it. And, you know, there are times when I am doing personal reflection and I'm sad and I'm missing Jesse, and that's okay. That's okay.

Those times are important. But when I want to shift out of that, that sadness, I use gratitude to do that. And again, I go back to this modeling and the awareness that we are modeling for our kids how to do this.

So, for JT, I would talk about what I was feeling. I would be authentic and share with him when I was sad, when I was missing Jesse. But then I would also show him how I shifted out of that sadness.

We'd be sitting and I would say, wow, that, you know, when that happened today, it reminded me of Jesse, and it made me sometimes it makes me happy today. It made me really miss him. And I actually cried.

I was sad. But then I started thinking about the fact that you and I were going out to dinner tonight and how wonderful it was that we had this time together. And it's just the two of us.

And we can talk about, you know, our weekend and our plans. And, you know, I mean, it's just I think it's that communication that we don't have a lot of today. It was interesting because before going into covid over 50 percent of Americans were saying that they were lonely.

And now, of course, the isolation is much greater. And I think that we really need to remember that our children need us, and they need communication with us. They need to be seen.

Everybody wants to be seen. Everybody wants to be heard and celebrated. And we can we can do this by sharing our gratitude for them and what they bring into our lives.

I think that gratitude, you know, I love this quote. It's not happiness that makes us grateful. It's gratitude that makes us happy or practicing gratitude that makes us happy.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: I think that you are 100 percent correct. I follow someone on Instagram who does a practice of gratitude every single morning, and I feel like it really has changed me and to get my my thoughts more positive. So, I love what you shared.

So, let's go back to your website, because I want everyone to know all of the free resources that you have for classrooms, for parents, for teachers and just for people who need help with all of these different coping mechanisms.

Scarlett Lewis Speaker: Absolutely. Everything that I'm talking about is on our website.

It's the Chooselovemovement.org. And you can go onto the website. You can poke around.

We have an amazing book club reading books that'll change your life. We have podcasts. We have blogs and blogs and free webinars in addition to our lifespan, comprehensive social and emotional and character development learning programs.

And so, I really encourage everybody to take advantage. Everything that we have on our website is no cost. Make sure that your schools are aware of this.

And we have programming for parents and programming for communities and small businesses. So please take advantage of all of this because it's no cost and it really can change your life. And and I live this message.

It came from my son's chalkboard message of nurturing, healing love. Those three words are in the definition of compassion across all cultures. And nurturing literally means loving kindness and gratitude.

And so here we are focusing on gratitude today.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: That's so great. So, as we are winding down the podcast, can you give us three takeaways that our audience might be able to put into action surrounding gratitude?

Scarlett Lewis Speaker: Yeah, absolutely.

There are so many physical, mental and emotional benefits of practicing gratitude. Gratitude is so vitally important. It's so good for us.

And that's one. Number two is when we're aware of the benefits of something that we're doing, we can experience them on an exponential level. That is research out of Harvard University.

So first of all, it's like, you know, you have a limited amount of resources every day, your energy, your time. And where are you going to put them? Well, you need to put them towards gratitude because there are so many benefits physically, mentally and emotionally. Number three is that they're my three favorite, let's just put it this way, benefits because you can find all of these on the Internet are a stronger immune system. Well, that's really important, especially now during COVID.

Better sleep. I don't know about you, but I love my sleep and longer life. Those are my three favorite.

But you are, you know, you have higher self-esteem. You're more optimistic. You're more resilient.

You have deeper relationships and more friendships. It helps you at work. You're healthier.

And so just really important to understand how vitally important practicing gratitude is on a daily basis all day long.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: I agree with you. So what is one challenge you want to leave our listeners with after this podcast series?

Scarlett Lewis Speaker: I would practice shifting your lens to an attitude of gratitude by putting a pen and paper by your bed.

And every morning I would write down three things that you're grateful for. Literally, I open my eyes and I'm literally grateful that I'm opening my eyes in the morning, and I write this down. And then when you go to bed, write down three things that you're grateful for.

Make sure that they're different. And then notice if you have a better day. If you're more productive, if you get along better with people, notice if your sleep is better, because I personally guarantee you that it will be.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Perfect. Scarlett, thank you so much for being here. We have two more episodes with her this month.

So, make sure to subscribe and we will see you all next week.